

Dane Co. Exec. Parisi: Convenes K-12 leaders to focus on emotional wellness of kids

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Dane County Executive Joe Parisi is convening local educational leaders to explore ways the community can best support the emotional and mental health needs of school kids as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to surge. The County Executive announced today he is forming his “K-12 Emotional Wellness Work Group” to advise county and school officials on strategies to help with the emotional and mental health challenges young people are currently facing.

“There’s no doubt the high rates of infection and increasing numbers of hospitalizations we are seeing would only be worse if our schools were fully open,” County Executive Parisi said. “This is a difficult trade-off, while it’s best for community public health it’s also resulted in new challenges for children, their families, and teachers. My hope is that by bringing educators and public and mental health experts together we can find ways to build off the partnerships we already have in place to improve the well-being of our young people,” Parisi concluded.

In the years prior to the pandemic, Dane County and ten different school districts joined forces to create a countywide school based mental health program. Known as “Building Bridges,” this initiative places teams of mental health professionals directly in schools, working with kids, families and educators. Dane County allocates nearly \$1 million for this program each year. Right now, this work is continuing virtually and one of the tasks of the County Executive’s new work group will be to see how the county and schools could further bolster emotional and mental health services to meet the growing acute needs seen as a result of the pandemic. This work could inform potential future national Covid relief dollars, should they become available in the coming weeks.

“As educators, achieving healthy academic outcomes for young people is just as important as supporting emotional well-being,” Verona Area School District Superintendent Dean Gorrell said. “We look forward to teaming with the county and other partners to rise to the incredible challenge Covid has created for all of us.”

Work group discussions will kick off in early November and include staff from Public Health Madison & Dane County and Dane County Human Services.